Seoul,
Then and Now

by Samuel H. Moffett, Ph. D.

Born in Pyengyang, Korea. B.A., Wheaton College, Wheaton, Ill. Th. B., Princeton Theological Seminary. Ph.D., Yale University. Board of Directors, Yonsei University, Korea. Professor, Presbyterian Theological Seminary, Korea. Dean of the Graduate School, Presbyterian Theological Seminary, Korea. Vice-President of the Korean-American Association, Seoul.

My father came to Seoul three-quarters of a century ago, in January, 1890. What a change the intervening years have brought to this city!

He came in through the old West Gate, which is

gone now. Fortunately he arrived before sunset, and the massive wooden gates, twelve feet high, studded with iron nails, were still open. A year or two later another missionary, a gentle Southern lady, arrived from America just after the gates had clanged shut with the setting of the sun. Once closed they could under no circumstances be opened until dawn, and her friends inside the city had no alternative but to haul her up ignominiously over the great stone city wall by ropes.

Once inside the West Gate my father turned down a narrow street to the right past the Ewha Haktang, a revolutionary new kind of school—a school for girls!—toward the rear of the Duksoo Palace where most of Seoul's sixty-nine Westerners, including the diplomatic community, then lived.

From there across to South Mountain he could see Seoul filling the valley like a low, brown-gray sea of tiles and straw. It was not much more than an overgrown village of 30,000 one-story houses and only three wide streets intersecting a maze of narrow, slippery alleys. The tallest commercial buildings in town were a row or two of long warehouses, two stories high, near the great bell which still marks the center of the city.

There were tigers and leopards in Peking Pass in those days, sometimes even inside the city wall where it climbed the hills on the north. Once in a while, they said, a courier bearing mail out to where Yonsei and Ewha Universities now stand was carried off by a tiger.

Seoul's entire population in 1890 was between

150,000 and 200,000 people. Today just its annual increase in population is greater than that. The big computer in the Bureau of Statistics tells me that there are now 3,490,294 people living inside Seoul, and that the city's population is increasing at the rate of 208,250 a year.

One of the biggest contrasts between Seoul then and now is the old city's strange emptiness of so many of the distinctive features that make it the city we know today, and as I list the changes in my mind I wonder if we have gained or lost.

There were, for example, no taxis or hapsungs or buses. Rivers of men in white clothes, wearing black, high-crowned hats, flowed gently through the streets, and others sat smoking in the sun. Sometimes a sedan chair with a high official carried by eight men at a run would break through the slow-moving masses, or a lesser official on a fat pony with two servants trying to clear the road in front of him and two more servants holding him up on his precarious, high-perched saddle some twenty inches above the pony's back. The only wheeled vehicles were bull-carts for the very low, and curious, one-wheeled sedan chairs rolled along by pole-bearers for the very high-born.

There were no women in the streets, in the lovely Korean silks that brighten Seoul's sidewalks today. Only women of the poorer classes ventured out in public by day, usually to wash clothes. But at eight o'clock in the evening the great bell sounded, and from then until midnight the streets were reserved for the women, and the men had to stay out of sight. The only exceptions were "blind men, officials,

foreigners' servants, and persons carrying prescriptions to the druggists." A lady of high position in Seoul told a visitor in 1894 that she had never seen the streets of Seoul by daylight.

There were no students. Today's Seoul is a city of universities, but then its schools were private little one-room affairs for pounding Chinese characters into the heads of eight or ten pig-tailed boys. Only once a year was Seoul filled with students. That was at the time of the national examinations, just after the New Year. Then men of all ages would pour in from all over the country, marked as students by their uniform: gauze caps shaped like "bakers' paper bags" and a large double apron hanging down front and back, tied above the waist with a ribbon. Shouting, singing, and eating, they paraded the streets arm in arm working off the nervous excitement that comes to all students before examinations.

There were no churches, either,—at least none to be seen. Early travelers often remarked on the absence of churches and temples in the Korean capital and wondered if the country was a land without a religion. Buddhist temples were forbidden in the city. No Catholic church had yet been built. And there were only two little Protestant churches, a Presbyterian and a Methodist, which looked no more like churches than any other mud-walled Korean houses in the city. Christianity's legal status was still doubtful. Altogether there were less than a hundred Protestant Christians in Seoul, and a considerably larger but still small group of Catholics. What a contrast today. For every one of that little band of early Protestant

Christians there are now five Protestant churches in Seoul, five hundred of them. One of them alone has a Sunday attendance of more than nine thousand people.

The most exciting event of the year in Seoul in 1890 was the arrival of the Imperial Chinese Mission in November for the funeral of the Dowager Queen Cho. The Chinese High Commissioners landed at Inchon. Ahead of them as they left the ship walked bearers with sign boards in large characters, "Silence," and "Keep out of the way." A deputy presented them with the King's formal calling card, printed on thick white paper a foot long. In their honour the King had ordered the road from Inchon to Seoul sprinkled all the way with yellow gravel (the Imperial colour), and had widened it so that five horses could walk it abreast. Up this road the procession marched, and on through the West Gate near my father's house. What a parade! First came the petty officials and attendants and soldiers led by the City Governor, about two thousand in all. Then the High Commissioners. Each Commissioner was acompanied by "four saddled horses and four grooms, three drivers, one yellow umbrella bearer, two pathfinders, four attendants, four litter ponies, four litter pony grooms, four litter attendants, one chief chair bearer and one sedan chair with eight sedan bearers, one pony for carrying rain coverings, two servants, four conch blowers, four pipers and four horn blowers, four supervisors of flag signals, six gong beaters, six first class lictors and two military officers in command of two detachments of

escorts, twenty-two silk flags, one petty official interpreter, one waiter, one cook, and seven interpreters of the third order." What a pity that the common people of Seoul were screened off from the sight of such glory. Retainers were ordered to line the streets with long white cloth curtains to keep the way clear for the imperial procession.

That old, strange world of the 1890's has passed away, but I caught a nostalgic glimpse of it right here in modern Seoul a few months ago. It was at the funeral of another queen, Queen Yun, the last of her line and the end of half a millennium of Korean history. For a while there as I watched the lines of stiff-robed mourners, the officials, and the royal musicians march out through the high gate of the old palace, I could almost imagine I was back in my father's Seoul.

Then I saw truck tires under the hearse, and a camera around the neck of one of the officials, and the spell was broken. But I am not really sorry.

I like Seoul better today. I like it with free and living people, with women in bright silks, and students and soldiers and workers, even when I complain that it is too crowded. I like it with darting taxis and hapsungs and over-stuffed buses, even when I grumble about the traffic. I like its new, high buildings and its older, higher mountains. And I like its churches, for I am a Christian and I know that a city without a faith is a city without a future. But Seoul's future, I believe, will be still greater than her past.

What Happened on Sam Il Day March 1, 1919

by Frank W. Schofield, D.V.S., L.L.D.

Born in Warwickshire, England. Immigrated to Canada, and graduated from Ontario Veterinary College, University of Toronto. Professor, Ontario Veterinary College. Hon. D.V.S., Ludvig Maximmillian University, Germany. L.L.D., Toronto University, Canada. Returned to Korea in 1958. Dae Hahn Min Gook Jahng medal for meritorious services rendered to the Republic of Korea. Hon. L.L.D., Korea University. Hon. D.V.M., Kyung Puk University. Medal of Honor, Kyung Hee University. Now living in Korea.

The unexpected death on January 21, 1919 of King Kojong, the last ruler of the Yi Dynasty, had come as a great shock to the whole nation. He had achieved nothing of outstanding merit during his

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